Masks Upon Masks

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Masks Upon Masks

by Marwana

Summary

Molly had everything she ever wanted after she had lost her husband: a new boyfriend who fit her perfectly. A dinner with her sister, her sister's new (and arrogantly rude) boyfriend, and her own boyfriend showed her a new side of Will she had never imaged before. It also meant that she was finally made aware of that one piece of history he had always seemed so reluctant to talk about.

Who said that people only needed to grieve for those they were in love with? Who said people could not grieve for lost friendship?
Prequel has been posted in the form of Caricature

Outtake:
"She had never seen her boyfriend like this before, and she had a hard time to connect the normally reclusive, awkward, unpolished man with the sophisticated one currently swirling his wine as if he was completely in his element while he talked about the different ways to cook veal with her sister. She knew that he was well-read and she knew that he was far from the stupid hick some people might believe him to be, but she had never even considered that he might be able to act like this."

Notes

I was recently rewatching the last season of Hannibal and I could not help but wonder what or how much Molly knew about Will's relationship with Hannibal. And if she knew, why did she still encourage him to go? Because Jack would not accept 'no' as an answer?
Hence this story. Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Tales from the Bookcase by Marwana

“It’s not even about my manners, or the fact that the restaurant is expensive and I don’t earn enough to pay for a meal there. I just don’t do social contact well,” he had warned her, repeatedly, before he had finally agreed to join her for dinner at a fancy restaurant with her sister and said sister’s new boyfriend. She hadn’t seen her sister for a couple of months, and she was looking forward to catching up and introducing her to Will, “the expectation and the needed small talk are draining and make me irritable. I would have to appear as something, or rather someone, I am not, and you might not recognise me.”

She had assured him that he would be fine. She had said it somewhat hesitantly as she hoped to make a good impression on her sister’s new partner and that her sister would like her own newish boyfriend, but she truly believed it. Her sister was used to people who could be awkward in social situations, and from what she had been told the boyfriend was a lawyer of some kind. He too would have had to deal with people who could be considered strange. Her sister had gushed a couple of time that the firm he worked for had acted as the defence of some criminals kindest described as being *off*. Her own boyfriend, kind and gentle as he was towards her, should no even be a blip on their radar.

So Will might be slightly awkward and didn’t like to meet the eyes of others. So he worked with his hands and didn’t have a fancy job or a fancy title. So he had visible scars in strange places, they could be explained away as he had worked within law enforcement until he had been attacked by that cannibalistic serial killer. He was a good man, and he was earnest and a hard worker. She would just have to warn her sister, and prepare to do some damage control if it was needed. Will was lovely, really, and he genuinely adored her, her dear Wally, and their dogs. He was everything she needed in her life.

oOo

Will had sent her a message that he would be running sightly late as he still needed to clean himself up after his long day repairing boat motors. He had given her a rough estimate, and she expected him any minute now. They were waiting for him to appear before they ordered their meal, but they had already requested something to drink and something to nibble on while they waited.

Not that she had minded that he wasn’t here yet. It meant that she had been able to catch up with her sister for a bit and to make the acquaintance of the new boyfriend who insisted she called him Anthony-Johan. She just called him the Boyfriend in the privacy of her own mind as the name was not only an incredibly pompous imitation of whatever elitist colleague he tried to copy, it was also a mouthful to even *think* of.

She had found the man to be arrogantly self-assured and she had quickly realised that she didn’t care much for him or his blustering brags. She couldn’t quite understand what her sister saw in him, but he might act or be different when it was just the two of them. Personally, she could only listen to him going on about knowing this rich person, or that famous person for so long before she started to tune out. The fact that he had actually loudly greeted some of the other guests, much to their baffled derision and her unease, didn’t help her regard for him.

The restaurant the lawyer had chosen to dine at, and was paying for, was incredibly pricy for the amount they put on the plates as far as she had seen, and not something she would normally enjoy going to. She just hoped that it would *taste* good.

She had had to buy a long, stylish, black formal dress and a pair of heels especially for the occasion. She didn't mind to dress up or to go to this place, but she preferred the smaller more informal and more homey restaurants where she could take Wally to and where people would not look down upon you for laughing out loud, or using the wrong utensil to eat with.

Will had assured her that he had a suit for the occasion when she had asked him if she needed to help him buy one. He wasn't the most fashionable person around as he, even more than she did, preferred his clothing to be of a decent quality but didn't particularly care beyond the fact that it needed to be easily cleanable and could stand some wear and tearing.

Low murmurs sounded from behind her, and the sound of two people purposefully making their way towards them could be noticed over the din of many individuals softly talking and enjoying their dinner.

"Here you are, sir," the waiter said courteously, far more politely and far more adulatory than he had been towards them, and she heard her boyfriend thanking him in a tone of voice she didn't really recognise. She wanted to turn around to greet him, but she was just as anxious to see what her sister thought of her own new boyfriend.

She had informed them that Will worked with motors and preferred dogs over people. She had told them about his southern roots and the fact that he used to work in law enforcement of some kind, but didn't really like to talk about it. She had noticed the slightly sneering upturn of lips the lawyer hadn't been able to hide after she had been done talking.

As far as she could see, both her sister and the lawyer boyfriend appeared both taken aback and at least somewhat impressed by what they saw. Se felt herself tense slightly as she realised that she wasn't quite sure if the amazement was positive or negative. Had her warnings been too little or too much?

"Good evening, darling," she was greeted softly in that lovely, barely there southern accent and she felt the briefest of kisses being pressed to the top of her head. She turned her head slightly towards him with a soft, genuinely pleased smile as she greeted him in kind but she didn't truly look at him. She was still too busy watching her sister for her reaction out of the corners of her eyes.

"My apologies for being late," he told the others in a tone of voice she had never heard before in its poshness as he pulled out his chair, and sat down. There was a brief pause between the two actions, and she curiously turned towards him to see why. Her breath caught a bit when she noticed what he was wearing.

The suit was deceptively simple. It was a dark navy two piece which he had combined with a crisp white dress shirt and a Bordeaux coloured tie neatly tied in an incredible fancy knot. The tie itself appeared to be made out of some slick, silky material and was clearly pricy. It was the suit however that took her truly by surprise. It fit Will perfectly and it was clearly tailored to his form. The material it and the dress shirt were made of was of a quality she

hadn't seen before and it was clearly expensive and not something prêt-à-porter. If she had to make a guess, mainly based on the sour looks the arrogant man at the other side of the table was shooting the suit her boyfriend was wearing, she would say that the navy suit was far more luxurious and far more expensive in its simplicity than whatever showy outfit the lawyer was wearing.

His hair was styled neatly, but whatever he had been using to slick it away from his forehead didn't show itself visibly. It appeared as soft as she knew it could be. The scar on his forehead was visible, but he didn't seem to be bothered by it or the glances her sister and the Boyfriend sneaked at it. His facial hair had been trimmed and showed off the scar that followed the line of his jawbone. She wondered if he deliberately had the scars on display or if he had forgotten they were there.

The aftershave he had dabbed on was subtle and like nothing she had ever smelled on him before. She knew he liked old spice for sentimental reasons, but this was far removed from that comforting scent she had learned to associate with him. Whatever he had on now was heady and a much better fit, and reminded her of the woods in the winter combined with something smoky. She wondered why he had never used it before and she made a note to herself to ask him about it.

She had no idea he had even owned a suit like he was currently wearing, or that he knew how to dress for a place as expensive as they currently were.

"I am Will Graham," her boyfriend introduced himself politely with a quirk of his lips, "you must be Margie? It is a pleasure, Molly has told me about you."
Her sister tittered something cliché, and she in turn introduced her own boyfriend. Will's greeting of the other man was aloof but civil. His greeting in return was much more short. For a moment she believed she had seen Will's lips tighten in aggravated disdain, but by the time she had blinked he was back to the polite smile he had been wearing since he had joined them.

oOo

The dinner went surprisingly well. Will wasn't acting awkward at all, and he was in fact a surprisingly good conversationalist. He was engaging, and he seemed to handle whatever topic was thrown his way in a way she would describe as elegantly. He acted as if he, more than anyone else at their table, belonged in restaurants like these, filled with the rich and influential and serving food and drinks that she could not even pronounce.

For dinner he had ordered the fish dishes, which hadn't come as a surprise to her as he seemed hesitant to eat any meat he didn't instantly recognise. The Boyfriend had immediately jumped in to order him a white wine to go with it, seemingly prepared to show off his superior knowledge, but Will had politely rebutted him and ordered a particular, cheaper red to go with his main course of sword fish. The lawyer had laughed sneeringly at him, but Will had ignored him with practices ease. The momentary tightening of his lips and around his eyes were the only thing that had given his displeasure away. And she was positive now that it had been the rudeness of the other man that had caused it. It had been minute, and she was sure the others had missed it, but for a brief moment he had appeared stony and cold. Dangerous, in a predatory manner.

He had however impressed the sommelier when he requested a glass of wine per dish that seemed to go perfectly with every single dish he had ordered. It might have been done as a response to the arrogant way the Boyfriend claimed to be a wine connoisseur, but his choices were genuine and not necessarily the most expensive option.

He had managed to be dragged into a conversation with the member of staff in which they discussed why the red wine he had ordered for his main course was superior over the standard white one the other man had ordered. The lively discussion lasted for ten whole minutes as it branched into other common mistakes people made when it came to wine other alcoholic beverages.

They hadn't been able to do more than watch on in sheer bafflement. She especially had been surprised at the level of knowledge her own boyfriend seemed to have on the topic, as she knew he favoured whiskey over wine or even beer. Her sister's partner had tried to add his own opinion to the conversation, but after the second time Will had given an argument why he was wrong he had sulkily stayed out of the discussion.

He also easily kept up with her sister when she talked about classical music, but she knew that his own preference was for rock and the southern music he had grown up with. She had never even heard him listen to classical music, and had even known him to turn devices such as the tv off when the vaguely popular numbers of Beethoven or Mozart could be heard. Yet, here he was discussing the merit of Puccini's Madame Butterfly over Verdi's Cleopatra e Cesare. She was only vaguely aware of either of them, and mainly because her sister had dragged her to both showings.

When the topic turned to artwork, he could bring forth arguments why a certain artist she had never heard of was better than another obscure one. Sports, cars, literature, languages, botany, foreign cuisine, and even the best way to handle babies and young children, he seemed to be able to discuss it all.

She had never seen her boyfriend like this before, and she had a hard time to connect the normally reclusive, awkward, unpolished man with the sophisticated one currently swirling his wine as if he was completely in his element while he talked about the different ways to cook veal with her sister. She knew that he was well-read and she knew that he was far from the stupid hick *some* people might believe him to be, but she had never even considered that he might be able to act like *this*. She did not know if she liked it.

There were some small ripples in his otherwise perfectly chivalrous behaviour, of course, such as the moment the lawyer had impatiently asked him where had bought the suit and her boyfriend had absentmindedly admitted that it was bespoke. The name of the tailor didn't mean a lot to her as she was not familiar with Baltimore at all, but it clearly rang a bell with the other man. His rude questioning of how a former enforcer of the law could afford a suit like that from a tailor like the one that had been mentioned had gotten him a particularly alien look of cold disdain that had silenced that tread of questioning before it had smoothed away in an aloof expression that she had never seen on Will before. Not even when he had been dealing with someone who had abused one of the dogs they had later on adopted.

The same had happened when the Boyfriend had started bragging about some of the criminal cases he or his law firm had handled. Will had challenged him on certain aspects, and the

man had eventually snapped.
“What would a former police officer know about serial killers,” the lawyer had barked out with an ugly look on his steadily reddening face, much to the discomfort of her sister. The man had been drinking more than he should, and had been making more and more digs towards Will as the evening wore on. He sister tried to calm him down, but he didn’t back down from his aggressive stance.

“Former special agent, I was a profiler for the FBI with a speciality in serial killer cases,” Will told him cooly, his eyes reptilian and dark as he slowly laid down his cutlery. She didn’t know what he was thinking, but the look in those normally soft eyes made her shiver. He reminded her of a shark: merciless and unpredictable, “and I was part of the team that *arrested* this particular killer on the count of eleven murders and two attempted kidnappings. The gunshot wound on his shoulder you bragged you sued someone for? I was the one who shot him when he attempted to kidnap someone in my care. I have never once seen any charges brought forward for that particular incident. The perpetrator *was* caught during said kidnapping, after all.”

That, more than anything else, seemed to be the straw that broke the camel’s back. The other man had clearly expected to impress all of them with his wealth, his knowledge, his degree, the people he knew, and his job. While her sister had a degree, she had chosen to work as an educator for children who didn’t fit or couldn’t keep up with normal schools. She herself had gone to college but never finished it as she preferred to man a shop and to care for her son. Will, as she had warned the others, was a mechanic who had formerly worked within as some kind of law enforcer. Of all of them, Will seemed to have the least impressive track record.

But instead of a socially awkward, bumbling ignoramus the other man could easily use to appear as the better of the two options, he got a well-dressed, well-educated, aloof but polite, former FBI special agent who could have easily fit within the high society he would have loved to integrate himself into. He even seemed to personally *know* some of the people the Boyfriend had bragged about working for.

The lawyer jumped up from where he had been sitting, his chair moved backwards with a screech that drew the attention of the other patrons nearby towards their table, and puffed himself up to show of his muscular torso. He glared down at Will, his face ruddy and his eyes stormy. Will, in turn, just remained seated as if unaffected by the sudden turn the conversation had taken, though his right hand moved slightly until it was parallel to his plate and his knife. His face was expressionless but his eyes were calculating and predatory as they flit over the standing male.

She felt a shudder go through her. This was not the first time she realised it, but this was her boyfriend as she had never seen him before. It was however the first time that evening that she realised that he might be the most dangerous person currently in the room.

“Sit down,” he ordered him softly but firmly as the other man opened his mouth. It was a tone of voice she hadn’t even heard him use on his dogs, and they were *trained* to follow his every, firmly stated command. This was something an officer of the law might use before a gun was drawn or before someone was shot. He added calmly, “you are causing a scene.” The Boyfriend spluttered but didn’t back down as he reared up to say something.

“Is everything alright here?” the same waiter who had served them the entire evening politely but firmly interrupted before the Boyfriend could say something. Or more specifically, he asked Will and completely ignored the arrogant lawyer. The waiting staff seemed to have taken a liking to her boyfriend which might have started out because he was the most well dressed and most elitist individual of the four of them, but which had become more genuine when Will had turned out to be both polite and knowledgeable about the dishes they served and the wine they sold. As all dishes had fancy foreign names without any ingredients listed, that had surprised her quite a bit.

“Everything is fine,” Will told the man with a closemouthed smile, his predatory gaze not once moving away from the lawyer, “something he *ate* did not agree with him. He was about to sit down again, weren’t you Tony?”

The combination of the pointed focus of the restaurant guests waiting for a show and the derisive way his name was said caused the other man to realise where they were and he looked around. The disdainful looks of polite but dark amusement sent his way by the other guests around them caused him to flush an embarrassed red as he deflated and he sat back down without ever having said anything. Even she knew that this was no place to cause a scene if one wanted to become or remain part of the high society he seemed to praise so much.

He kept himself small and he was silent for the rest of the evening. He also didn’t tip the staff when they left not too long after. He stomped out of the building without waiting for her sister, or without saying goodbye to either her or to Will. She was highly amused by the childish reaction, and she had the feeling that she would not see him again anyway. Her own son was more mature than that man had been, so she doubted that the relationship would last.

She and her sister remained standing by the door, softly talking about everything they felt important to share without either of the men nearby, while they waited for Will. Het boyfriend had made his way over towards the counter where their waiter and the sommelier he had been talking to earlier were standing behind. They both noticed him exchanging some words with them, and the both of them shaking their heads while they shot disdainful looks towards the door leading outside. She had the feeling the Boyfriend – soon to be *ex* – would not be welcomed back anytime soon.

This exchange of words was followed by Will unbuttoning his suit jacket before taking out a sleek, black wallet from within. He opened it and handed the waiter a card. They watched on in silence, their conversation had tapered off as they both studied her man for different reasons, as the waiter inclined his head in what appeared to be thanks and him moving towards the register. Will stayed behind and exchanged some additional words with the sommelier, who was expressively waving around a hand.

“Are you sure he is socially awkward?” her sister asked her softly as they watched the animated exchange of words. Will appeared so comfortable, so completely sure of himself, as he laughed softly at something he other man said. His back was straight and his entire posture seemed confident, but loose.
“I- yeah,” she answered, she bit her bottom lip briefly as she considered if she should tell her. In the end she told her, “he truly is. He- uh, he has an empathy disorder of some kind. He told

me he dislikes social contact because he always knows what everyone is thinking or feeling. He can also easily mimic anyone he wants. I think he is currently acting like someone else, someone I have never met before. Someone he must know really well, and was probably close to before he removed himself from his old life."

Her sister looked at her in shock, "how?"
"A combination of too many mirror neurons and an active imagination," she answered the mostly unspoken question, embarrassed on behalf of Will, "combined with the fact that he is incredibly smart and has a large well of knowledge, as you might have noticed."
"No kidding!" her sister exclaimed in delight, "I really enjoyed my conversation with him. He seems good for you, especially if he is normally not as well together as he is now. I wondered about that, you know. You are so down to earth, and here you appear with some fancy elitist on your arm. I am normally the one who goes for the snobs."
They both laughed softly, and she felt something ease inside of her at het sister's words. She had accepted Will in her life. That made the entire dinner worth it.

They turned their attention back towards her boyfriend as the fact that the sommelier suddenly stopped himself midsentence drew their interest. They watched on in companionable silence as the man moved away from the counter and towards the back of the restaurant. The waiter had returned with Will's credit card in the meantime. Will thanked him, put it back into that strange wallet, and buttoned his suit jacket again. It didn't take long before they were once again joined by the sommelier who handed Will the bottle he had been carrying.

They talked for a brief while longer before they shook hands and Will made his way over towards them. He gallantly offered her his arm, the bottle of wine he had been given was carried underneath the other and he escorted them out.

oOo

She silently watched on as he shed the layers of his suit one by one, and with it the mental layers he had donned that turned him into something he was not, until he was dressed in nothing more than a pair of boxers. He hung every piece neatly on clothing hangers, and gently removed any creases that had appeared while he had been wearing it. With every layer he shed, she watched him droop a bit more, until nothing was left but a drained, unsocial man. The boyfriend she was used to.

"Thank you for indulging me," she started hesitantly, and she graciously accepted the murmur of anytime before she finally blurted out, "you said you didn't do social interactions. What was that? Why did you have that suit?"

Something in his face tightened, and his eyes darkened with more emotions than she could read. She recognised betrayal, grief, a deep well of sadness and hurt, but also something achingly vulnerable. Whatever the story behind the suit and his behaviour was, it was a painful one. He sat down heavily next to her, his hands folded together on his knees and intertwined.

"I used to have a – a friend who enjoyed the finer things in life," he finally said with a hollow laugh. She gently rubbed his arm, "he… he was rich, incredibly so, and fancy and very much

at the top of whatever elite scene Baltimore had, but he didn't rub it in. In fact, he liked to bring me along whenever he could. He was a very good cook, his many acquaintances almost *fought* for the honour of being invited to his rare dinner parties, but he invited me regularly over at his place to cook for me or brought me meals if I could not make it. I had a standing invitation for whatever dinner party all the other people had to fight for."

He let out a hollow laugh as he hunched forward even more, "the suit was actually a gift so *I* would not feel embarrassed, as he didn't mind being photographed with me wearing flannel and distressed slacks covered in dog hair. His car cost about as much as a house in some areas, but he didn't mind picking me up with it even though I was covered in mud or blood or sweat, or transporting my entire pack of dogs. He was incredibly intelligent, but went out of his way to talk to me over his equally brilliant colleagues. I could keep up with him, but I was not as well travelled or as well educated."

"He saw you as an equal, even though you didn't have the same amount of money. He cared for you as a person, unlike what he felt for those other acquaintances of his," she said out loud slowly, "he was your friend, a close one."
He nodded jerkily as he wrung his hands. The memories of whoever it was seemed to pain him.

"What happened?" she asked.
"He hurt me, mentally and physically, and he betrayed our friendship and whatever trust I had in him. If he even considered whatever we had to be a friendship at all, and not some experiment or a means to entertain himself," he told her bitterly, "he was a serial killer who framed me for his murders and I helped put him away for his crimes. Some empath I am, I completely missed it. In my excuse, I did have encephalitis at the time. Which he knew and hid from me."

She blinked in shock at not only his words, but the grief she could hear in his voice. She numbly said, "the friendship was real for you. You *loved* him, considered him to be your best friend. Part of your pack. Probably still do."
He just nodded, his entire body showed his weariness as he leaned away from her and the hand that was still rubbing his arm and rested his head in his hands.

"Most of the scars I have are caused by him, either directly or indirectly," he told her hollowly, muffled by his hands, "and yet, I still have to stop myself from calling his former mobile phone number whenever I want to talk to someone. I had actually dialled it when we started dating, I was so *happy* and I wanted to share that. I still know it by mind, even now. It was only the tinny automatic response that informed me that the number was no longer in use that brought me back to reality."

"Oh Will," she murmured. There was nothing she could say that would make it better. Just as she was still grieving for the husband she had lost, he was grieving for the ruined friendship. No wonder he didn't like to talk about it. Most people wouldn't be able to understand that grief or why he missed someone so *toxic*. She moved towards him and wrapped an arm around him. She might not understand either, but that didn't mean that he wasn't allowed to grief.

He removed his hands and looked at her. His eyes were dark and shiny with tears and she could easily read the bone-deep exhaustion he carried with him.
"He still sends me letters," he said softly as he turned into her embrace, "for some reason the FBI goes against their own protocol and forwards them towards my address. *He* doesn't know where I live, though I have no doubt he could easily find out even from the BSHCI, but the FBI does. Every single month I receive an entire epistle. He even sends *gifts* though he should no longer *have* any money or access to any funds. They are never dangerous or gauche, but always in line with what I like or care about. I can't even throw them out because they are *exactly* what I would have bought or what I need. If I threw them out, it would just mean that I would have to buy the exact same thing at a latter moment. I am always reminded of him."

He laughed, but it sounded pained. It hurt her to see him reduced to the state he was currently in, and all for a dinner they could have held elsewhere.

"It is going to become easier," she told him softly, "it might not be easy and it might never fully go away, but I am here. I might not understand as my husband never hurt me the way you have been hurt, but I am here and I will listen if you want to talk about it."

He shot her a watery smile and gently pressed his forehead against hers.
"Thanks, darling," he said softly before he kissed her. It was soft and gentle, and not meant to lead to anything.

Hours later, when he had finally fallen asleep but she was still laying wide awake and considering everything she had learned that evening, she promised herself that she would always be there whenever he needed to deal with whoever it was that had hurt him so and his feelings for him.

She broke her own promise years later, when she asked him to assist in the capture of whoever was murdering entire families. Those families were so similar to what they had: happy and confident in their relationship with each other. Too similar, even, and she irrationally feared that they might be next.

His eyes showed his desperation when he informed her that he might not be the same when he returned and that it meant he might have to deal with *him*, but she told him to go anyway. Her fear for the safety of her son and their own little bubble was stronger than the resolution she had felt when she had first made that promise to herself.

She would always remember those eyes and how they changed. The way that desperation was locked away and the empty looks she was graced with afterwards. The cool and distant way he treated her when she was in the hospital after the attack, and the fact that no one told her of the deal he had made with *him*. The way those eyes had become so alien to her in how the very look in them slowly but surely turned into the calculating and predatory one she had seen all those years ago during that dinner.

There was no body to bury, and even if they had *survived* the fall as agent Crawford seemed to believe, she doubted that the Will Graham she had known was still alive. She would mourn her second husband for the rest of her life, and she would always wonder with no small amount of guilt if he would have still been around if she had only kept her promise.

She just hoped he was happy now, wherever he was.

End Notes

Prequel has been posted in the form of Caricature

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!